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UNCLAS PRAGUE 000111

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: CZECH CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES APPROVES EXTENSION OF MP MISSION IN IRAQ

REF: A. PRAGUE 60

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 25

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified - Not for Internet Distribution.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary. On January 21 the Czech Chamber of Deputies, parliament's lower house, approved the extension of the Czech military police (MP) mission in Iraq until the end of 2005. With a few exceptions, the coalition and opposition Civic Democratic (ODS) MPs voted as a bloc in favor, while the Communist Party unanimously opposed the move, as expected. The approval went smoothly, largely because PM Gross chose a smart strategy of consulting potential opponents beforehand and not binding Social Democratic (CSSD) MPs to vote in favor. The fact that the request came formally from the British and Iraqi contributed to the positive outcome. The proposal now moves to the Senate, which is expected to approve it without delay. End Summary.

[1](#)3. (SBU) 125 out of the 181 deputies present voted in favor of extending the military police mission serving in the British sector in southern Iraq; 46 voted against. Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Vladimir Lastuvka (CSSD), an opponent of the war in Iraq, abstained, and former Foreign Minister Jan Kavan, another critic of the Iraqi war, voted in favor. Our contacts in CSSD, including some who have raised objections to the war in Iraq and remain skeptical about Iraq's democratic future, said that the approval can largely be credited to the fact that the request came from the British and the Iraqis (both PM Blair and PM Allawi wrote to PM Gross formally seeking the extension); the GOCR made no public mention of the U.S. role. Another factor generating support for the extension was the agreement to move the Czech MPs into the NATO Training Mission once Phase III is launched later this year.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In general, Czech officials and parliamentarians agree that no matter what happened in the past, it is not time to leave Iraq until some normalcy returns to the country. However, they remain skeptical about the outcome of the January 30 elections given the security situation in the country. Gross's decision to meet with potential CSSD opponents of the extension provided an opportunity to alleviate embarrassment in Parliament. Defense Minister Kuhn's ability to allocate the necessary money, estimated at 7.5 million US dollars, from the defense budget also bore positively on the final decision.

[1](#)5. (U) The extension still needs the approval of the Senate. The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defense and Security Committee will discuss the proposal on January 26. A vote is possible January 27. No significant opposition is expected.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Comment: Czech officials acknowledge privately that behind-the-scenes USG efforts to build support for the extension and smooth the way for the transition to the NATO Training Mission (reftels) were important to the surprisingly swift and noncontroversial extension. In addition to demonstrating the Czech's commitment to remain engaged in the war in Iraq, the deft handling of the extension vote is a sign that we can continue to work with PM Gross on matters of importance to the U.S., despite his weakened political position.

HILLAS